

JFK Staff 'Undermined' Administration--Johnson

Difficulty in Transition
Period Cited

By JERRY BUCK

NEW YORK (AP).—Former President Lyndon B. Johnson says his administration was "in effect undermined" by some former Kennedy staff members during the transition following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963.

Johnson said he attributed this more to a difference in viewpoint and to grief than to an organized effort. He said he wanted them to stay and serve him as they had served Kennedy, but one by one they left.

Johnson appeared on a televised interview on CBS Saturday night from which the network said some statements had been deleted "on the grounds of national security." Published accounts said the deleted remarks concerned the Warren Commission report on the Kennedy assassination.

In the interview conducted by Walter Cronkite, Johnson said a handicap of the transition period was "the difference in viewpoints and the fact that some of the people who served did not share either the desire or the hopes that I had for the country and for the government, and they, in effect, undermined the administration and bored from within to create problems for us and leaked information that was slanted and things of that nature."

RESIGNED AT PERIODS

"A good many of them resigned at certain periods and left the impression that the government was not in keeping with their views and so forth."

Johnson, dressed in a gray suit and seated in a leather chair in a guest house on the LBJ Ranch in Texas, paused often during the answer and seemed to be searching for words.

He said he wanted to keep the staff because they had been chosen by Kennedy and because Kennedy had chosen him as "executor, his trustee, to stand

in for him."

Johnson said, "So I endured some handicaps, and I suffered some heartaches, some disappointments, because of my desire to try to present a united front and let nothing I did create an excuse for division."

CAN'T ANSWER

Asked if he thought these staff members were led by the late Robert F. Kennedy, then attorney general, Johnson said, "I can't answer that question honestly and directly; I don't know. I don't believe that all of those left, left because someone directed them to or urged them to. I think they were grief-stricken. I think that they no longer felt that they could be up to what was required of them, that their relationship with the President was a special relationship that they couldn't transfer to some new person."

Less than a minute into the program, which was filmed last fall, an announcer said, "Certain material has been deleted from this broadcast at President Johnson's request, made

on the grounds of national security."

The Washington Post reported Tuesday that the material deleted contained remarks by Johnson questioning some findings of the Warren Commission on the assassination.

The newspaper quoted a CBS source as saying that Johnson was asked his opinion of the findings and replied that he has never been "absolutely" satisfied with the report.

SAFETY A CONCERN

Johnson also said:

—Both he and President Kennedy had had some concern about safety in Dallas, particularly because of demonstrations against Adlai E. Stevenson, then ambassador to the United Nations.

—He could recall few details of the shooting and remembered hearing only the first shot. His first thought was that "this is a terrifying thing that may have international consequences, that this might be an international conspiracy of some kind."

—He felt it was the consensus of the Kennedy staff that he should take Air Force One back to Washington. He said questions about this did not arise until months later. Johnson said he observed no animosity on the plane.

—He could not recall whether Robert Kennedy brushed past him when the plane landed in Washington, as has been speculated. In any case, he said, "I would not have felt any offense in a critical period like that and carrying the burden and troubles that he was carrying."

—He was surprised that the ramp was removed from the plane after Kennedy's body was unloaded. He said, "It didn't occur to me that the ramp would be removed and we would not be privileged to go down the same ramp with the body." Asked if he inquired about it or considered it a family matter, he answered, "No, I just ob-

served it, as I did a good many things."

—There was no truth to reports that Mrs. Kennedy was aloof to him. "Mrs. Kennedy talked to me and expressed herself to me a number of times," he said. "And for the stories to have any merit at all, there would have to be a lot of hypocrisy involved, and I know that that term should never be associated with Jacqueline Kennedy."

Johnson said that contrary to published reports before the assassination he had every assurance from Kennedy that he would again be the vice-presidential candidate in 1964.

"If you're asking did I seek assurances, the answer is 'no,'" he replied. "If you're asking did I believe that I had assurances, that answer is a positive 'yes.' I never distrusted President Kennedy. Maybe one of my weaknesses, I distrust very few people."

At another point he said that while he and the President "were not like brothers, we were not constant companions," he felt he had been treated fairly and with respect.

Johnson said that some of the people who resigned from the White House staff "are among the people who I admire for what they did for their country. Ted Sorensen, who I believed to be the President's principal personal counsellor, I thought certainly the ablest person in his vicinity, and perhaps the most devoted and dedicated to what was best for this country. He served me faithfully, but for only a short period of time. I hated to see him leave. I think he honestly, conscientiously left on his own accord without any direction from anyone else, because he just felt that he—the White House would never be the same, the relationship was gone."

Asked if he felt he was operating under the handicap of a

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shadow because of the events in Dallas, Johnson replied:	with my accent and his accent, mistake.	I had those things happen to me
“Yes, I had many problems in my conduct of the office being contrasted with President Kennedy’s conduct of the office, with my manner of dealing with things and with his manner,	background. “He was a great public hero and anything that I did that someone didn’t approve of, they would always feel that President Kennedy wouldn’t have done that—that he would have done it in a different way, that he wouldn’t have made that	“And when I had some minor Bay of Pigs, or missile crisis, or difficulties as he had with Khrushchev in Vienna and came back and added billions to the defense budget and recommended to us and Congress that we call up the reserves—which we didn’t get ready for a crisis that really didn’t develop—but when
		there was a group in the country, and very important, and influential molders of opinion who I think genuinely felt that if President Kennedy had been there those things wouldn’t have happened to him. And I hoped it wouldn’t have. And maybe it wouldn’t have—because it was a problem.”